

Understanding Kalachakra empowerment and lineage

A Kalachakra initiation requires months of planning and preparation and the services of hundreds of monks, lay people and volunteers. It is one of the most elaborate and costly (\$5 million, Washington 2011) blessing ceremonies in Buddhism. Regardless of the enormous effort required, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has given the Kalachakra initiation thirty one times throughout the world and preparations have been underway for a year for the next initiation in Bodhgaya, India (in December) where five to six hundred thousand people are expected to attend. Of the millions of people who have received or attended Kalachakra initiations it is doubtful that many have questioned the true origins, lineage, meaning and relevance of this high tantric teaching.

As such, I write this article to explore:

1. a basic definition of Kalachakra
2. why His Holiness the Dalai Lama may choose to give Kalachakra empowerments so often given its cost and complexity
3. the main purpose of receiving Kalachakra initiation
4. if receiving Kalachakra initiation provides an opportunity to pursue the sublime tantric path further
5. after receiving the Kalachakra initiation, who is qualified to guide you on the sublime tantric path

The word Kalachakra has a rich, complex definition that is too extensive for an article such as this, however it is possible to provide a basic overview. Kalachakra, a Sanskrit word, literally translates to *kala* meaning *time* and *chakra* meaning *wheel*, together a simple definition could be *ultimate wheel of time*. Another way to define Kalachakra briefly is the *three Kalachakras*: *external Kalachakra* (outer universe: all phenomena), *internal Kalachakra* (inner universe: body, speech and mind) and *other Kalachakra* (other universe: enlightened universe). Any person who seeks to receive Kalachakra initiation should, at the very least, be able to define its meaning and how it can be integrated into one's life.

It is important to realise that no one is qualified to presume His Holiness the Dalai Lama's reasons for giving Kalachakra empowerments, only *possible* causes may be discussed. The Kalachakra tantra is known by Tibetan Buddhist traditions as the King of Tantra and is considered superior to other tantras. It is through Kalachakra practice that we are able to unveil the sublime enlightened inner universe (Buddhahood), we all have the capacity for this.

Secondarily, the Kalachakra tantra prophesizes that a Golden Age will come to be in approximately 400 years time. This means the Kings of Shambhala will transform our

contemporary world into an exceptional world where Kalachakra practitioners (and those connected to Kalachakra) reside. As initiation is necessary for Kalachakra practice, and entry into the Golden Age, it could be suggested that His Holiness the Dalai Lama chooses to give Kalachakra empowerments to enable students to enter this exceptional world.

Before Kalachakra initiation one should practice the five common preliminary trainings:

- taking refuge
- Bodhicitta
- Vajrasattva purification
- mandala offering for accumulation of merit
- guru yoga

To practice Kalachakra beyond these trainings it is necessary to be formally invited, this is the primary purpose of initiation. As is evident, receiving an invitation to this great path is based on causes and conditions of both the receiver and the giver - simply attending the ceremony does not guarantee that one will receive *true* initiation. So too, the ceremony may form a connection to the path yet it is not *the* path. One can liken Kalachakra initiation to receiving a seed for practice however it is the practitioner that plants, nurtures and cultivates the seed. It is also the practitioner who will benefit from the fruit it bears.

Kalachakra initiation is a condition for practicing the tantric path further. In fact, two very special practices must be undertaken, these are generation Kalachakra (Tibetan: *ked rim*) and tantric shamatha (Tibetan: *wen sum*). After the practices are complete one advances to the Six Yogas for the body and mind, which is an advanced completion practice known in Tibetan as *tsog rim xho tuk*. These sublime yogas can take the practitioner to the attainment of Buddhahood in one lifetime.

Kalachakra is considered the most extensive Buddhist practice, for this reason it requires extraordinary effort, dedication, pure transmission and spiritual guidance from a Kalachakra master. The only tradition on earth qualified to guide Kalachakra practice further is the Jonang lineage, found in remote Tibet.

Jonang has taught, practiced and mastered Kalachakra since the 13th century. Today the focus of every Jonang monastery is to master the King of Tantra and realise its truth. Sadly other traditions have lost this system of practice in its entirety however some continue to teach segments of the tantra, as transmitted from Jonang. Jonangpas (those who possess the Kalachakra tantra) have a great wish that the complete system will be rediscovered by other traditions.

The reader may now question whether His Holiness the Dalai Lama's monastery has this system of practice today? The answer is *no*. Monks from His Holiness the Dalai Lama's monastery perform Kalachakra rituals and preparation for the initiation only, not extended and completion practices. It is believed that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has the advanced Kalachakra tantra.

Despite being the holders of this very special teaching, Jonang is not well known outside of Tibet. For this reason it is important to briefly expand on Jonang's history. Buddhism originated in India and began to travel to Tibet during the 7th century, along the way it transformed into various lineages. The roots of the Jonang lineage can be traced back to the 8th century and the tradition became well known in the 11th century through the efforts of Zi Lotsawa Garwi Dorje and Tsen Timet Sherab (from the sutra lineage).

The Kalachakra tantra lineage came from Dro Lotsawa who pieced together teachings from seventeen lineages to create the complete Kalachakra system (King of Tantra). At that time advanced teachings were not available in writing, instead they were transmitted directly from teacher to student. To make the teachings more accessible, Mahasiddha Drupchen Yimo compiled them in writing in the 11th century. Kunphang Tukje Tsondu built a permanent monastery at Jomonang, a holy site in the Tsang region of Tibet, in the 13th century. The lineage was then formally named Jonangpa after the region.

Great Jonang scholars include:

- **Dolpopa**
4th resident lama of Jomonang monastery and Jonang master
Dolpopa composed a compendium of texts (including the Mountain Doctrine) on the special view of Shentong Madhyamika held by the Jonang tradition and shared and debated this throughout Tibet in the 14th century. The view is now known as *superior view of Madhyamika*.
- **Kunga Drolchok**
Jonang master
Composed teachings of all Tibetan traditions which became renowned throughout Tibet. Before he passed away, Kunga prophesized his next reincarnation would be Taranatha.
- **Taranatha**
Jonang master
Famous throughout Tibet, Taranatha created doctrines to instruct students in all tantric lineages, he also transmitted these doctrines and instructions to all traditions. Most of our tantric teachings today are connected with Taranatha. For this reason he is considered a lineage treasure. He served both Tibet and Mongolia spiritually and politically. Later, he reincarnated as a Mongolian prince known as Kalka Jetsun Dampa.

In the 1980's, the 10th Panchen Lama registered six Tibetan spiritual traditions with the government of the Republic of China:

- Bon
- Nyingma
- Sakya
- Kagyu
- Jonang
- Gelug

Today there are approximately ninety Jonang monasteries throughout Tibet and newly established monasteries in neighbouring countries. His Holiness the Dalai Lama recently offered one of his monasteries in Shimla (northern India) to Jonang monks and a monastery was founded in Nepal by Tulku Tashi Gyalsen. Jonang practice is slowly arriving in the West with the migration of Tibetan teachers and western students.

Given the extensive history and contribution Jonang has made - and continues to make - to Tibetan Buddhism, it is perplexing that the lineage is not yet officially registered as major tradition by the Tibetan Government in Exile. There are Jonang supporters pursuing such recognition today so that Jonang's importance is recognised globally.

As is evident, further Kalachakra practice requires the guidance of a Jonang master. So too, the student must learn all aspects of the Jonang tradition, including Jonang's unique teachings and colourful history. *If you're interested in locating a teacher in your part of the world, please see below this article.*

The complete Kalachakra system is a high tantric teaching involving preliminaries, initiation, disciplined practice and guidance. Kalachakra practitioners take a path to transform their inner universe and, the exceptional student, to attain enlightenment.

I wish you great discovery on your journey after initiation.

Khentrul Rinpoche

Khentrul Rinpoche is the spiritual director of Rime Buddhist Institute, located in Melbourne Australia. He studied in 11 different monasteries from all Tibetan traditions, under 25 different teachers, over 15 years. He was awarded Rime master (meaning master of all traditions) and is the recognized reincarnation of Getse Khentru. Rinpoche's training also included a three-year Kalachakra retreat following the Jonang tradition, as well as a year-long solitary retreat. He has been in Australia since 2003 and founded Rime Institute in 2005. Currently he is working on a number of books about Jonang practice. His text 'Unveiling your sacred truth' is a detailed guide to Buddhist practice for all levels and takes teachings from all traditions.

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Where can you learn Kalachakra?

You'll need to find a Jonang teacher. If you're in the West and only speak English, this can be quite difficult.

New York: Khenpo Chojor Gyatso

Georgia: Khenpo Chojor Gyatso

Atlanta: Khenpo Ngawang Dorje

Australia: Khentrul Jamphal Lodro Rinpoche, Rime Institute Melbourne

You may also like to head to this website to learn more about groups specialising in Kalachakra all over the world: http://kalachakranet.org/ikn_kpg_index.html